

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A remote control, comprising:

a button having an associated means for indicating that the button may be operated to

5 interact with interactive program content;

a receiving circuit for accepting a transmission to activate the means for indicating; and

a transmission circuit for transmitting a signal in response to activation of the button

when the means for indicating is activated.

10 2. The remote control as in claim 1, wherein the button is a hard button.

3. The remote control as in claim 1, wherein the button is a soft button.

4. The remote control as in claim 1, wherein the means for indicating comprises a visual means.

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5. The remote control as in claim 4, wherein the visual means comprises a means for selectively modifying the appearance of the button.

6. The remote control as in claim 5, wherein selectively modifying the appearance of the button

20 comprises animating the button, illuminating the button, or changing the color of the button.

7. The remote control as in claim 6, wherein selectively modifying the appearance of the button is performed intermittently.

8. The remote control as in claim 1, further comprising a label associated with the button indicating the nature of the functionality provided by the button.

9. The remote control as in claim 8, wherein the label resides on the button.

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10. The remote control as in claim 8, wherein the label resides adjacent the button.

11. The remote control as in claim 8, wherein the label comprises alphanumeric characters.

10 12. The remote control as in claim 8, wherein the label comprises a graphical symbol.

13. The remote control as in claim 1, wherein the receiving circuit comprises an IR receiver.

14. The remote control as in claim 1, wherein the receiving circuit comprises an RF receiver.

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15. The remote control as in claim 1, wherein the transmitting circuit comprises an IR transmitter.

16. The remote control as in claim 1, wherein the transmitting circuit comprises an RF

20 transmitter.

17. The remote control as in claim 1, wherein the signal comprises data for use in making a purchase, answering a questions, or initiating a multimedia program.

18. A method for controlling operation of a remote control having a button and an associated means for indicating that the button may be operated to interact with interactive program content, comprising:

activating the means for indicating in response to a transmission received by the remote

5 control; and

allowing the remote control to transmit a signal in response to activation of the button when the means for indicating is activated.

19. The method as in claim 18, wherein the button is a hard button.

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20. The method as in claim 18, wherein the button is a soft button.

21. The method as in claim 18, wherein the means for indicating comprises a visual means.

15 22. The method as in claim 21, further comprising selectively activating the visual means to modifying the appearance of the button.

23. The method as in claim 22, wherein selectively activating the visual means to modifying the appearance of the button comprises animating the button, illuminating the button, or changing

20 the color of the button.

24. The method as in claim 22, wherein selectively activating the visual means is performed intermittently.

25. A method for signaling a user to provide a response to a prompt via a remote control, the method comprising the steps of:

displaying the prompt to the user via an entertainment system;

controlling the appearance of at least one of a plurality of buttons on a remote control

5 used with the entertainment system to indicate to the user that a response may be made to the prompt through operation of the button.

26. The method as in claim 25, further comprising receiving at the remote control a transmission from the entertainment center used to control the appearance of the at least one of a plurality of

10 buttons.

27. The method as in claim 25, wherein controlling the appearance of the button comprises animating the button, illuminating the button, or changing the color of the button.

15 28. The method as in claim 25, wherein controlling the appearance of the button is performed intermittently.

29. A system for facilitating and encouraging user interaction with program content, the system comprising;

20 an entertainment system for providing and displaying the program content, including a prompt which requests a response from the user, and for transmitting at least one instruction to the remote control; and

a remote control having at least one button, the remote control being responsive to the instruction for modifying the appearance of the at least one button to indicate to the user that a response may be made to the prompt via operation of the button.

5 30. The system as in claim 29, wherein the button includes a means for selectively modifying the appearance of the button to indicate to the user that a response may be made via operation of the button.

10 31. The system as in claim 30, wherein the means for selectively modifying the appearance of the button comprises animating the button, illuminating the button, or changing the color of the button.

32. The system as in claim 30, wherein selectively modifying the appearance of the button is performed intermittently.

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33. The system as in claim 29, wherein the instruction comprises a data signal including at least a control command identifier for indicating that the instruction is a button based command.

20 34. The system as in claim 33, wherein the button based command comprises data indicative of a button mode, button color, and button on time.

35. The system as in claim 33, wherein the control command identifier further includes a command for restricting operation of the remote control such that only the button indicated by the instruction may be operated.

5 36. The system as in claim 35, wherein the command for restricting operation is activated for a preset time period.

37. The system as in claim 29, wherein a first button and a second button are included on the remote control and the instruction includes a first button based command for controlling the
10 appearance of the first button and a second button based command for controlling the appearance of the second button.

38. The system as in claim 37, wherein the first button based command functions to modify the appearance of the first button to indicate to the user that a first response to the prompt may be
15 made via operation of the first button, and the second button based command functions to modify the appearance of the second button to indicate to the user that a second, alternate response to the prompt may be made via operation of the second button.

39. The system as in claim 38, wherein the first response is an affirmative response, and the
20 second response is a negative response.

40. A method for notifying a user of an event via a remote control, the method comprising the steps of:

sending at least one instruction from an entertainment system to the remote control;

controlling the appearance of at least one of a plurality of buttons on a remote control via the instruction to notify the user of an event.